From Subordination to Liberation: A Study of Metamorphosis of Women Characters in Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

A

Synopsis

Submitted for Registration to the Ph.D. (English) Programme in the

University Department of English

(Faculty of Humanities)

Ranchi University, Ranchi

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RANCHI UNIVERSITY, RANCHI
2024

State of the Art

Subordination of women in a patriarchal society is a timeless phenomenon. Patriarchal society often views women as 'the other,' and this process is hidden behind various societal norms, rules, tradition, and, most often, restrictions that are specifically made for women. Women since the beginning of society, have been suffering because of the never ending sexist ideologies. The famous work of Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), is widely known as a seminal text of the feminist movement and is often regarded as a classic. The importance of women's rights has been emphasized, not only for the benefit of women themselves, but also for the betterment of society as a whole. Mary Wollstonecraft was a pioneering thinker who believed that gender attributes were social, not natural. Similarly, Margaret Fuller, in her seminal work *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), sought to dispel the prevailing gender stereotypes. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) also challenged conventional views on gender, and she argued for the need for women to reclaim and revitalize their true identities. Over time, a number of feminist texts emerged, questioning and challenging the traditional belief system. The history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases: the first phase, beginning in the mid-19th century, initiated when reformists began to speak in favour of women rights by making reforms in education and customs involving women, the second phase, from 1915 to Indian independence, when Gandhi incorporated women's movements into the Quit India movement and independent women's organisations began to emerge; and finally, the third phase, post-independence, which has focused on fair treatment of women at home after marriage as well as the work force, and their right to political parity. With the

increasing awareness among women during the post-independence era, the feminist movement largely influenced literature. Feminist writings became one of the most popular trends in literary works.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, one of the greatest artists of Indo American fiction, captures the attention by transforming the women into an epic mode. The author portrays women as victims, rebellions, and they carry quest for identity. The feministic views of the author open new perspectives. All her protagonists have a strong will, determination as well as weakness with which they try to be heroic and victorious. As she is born in India, she knows the problems of women in the male dominated society. She wants to spread awareness about women's equality and freedom. She, through her novels, makes her protagonists uniquely express their place and rights in this world and attain their choices of life and face the consequences boldly.

This synopsis entitled *From Subordination to Liberation: A Study of Metamorphosis of Women Characters in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni,* explores the ways in which the author depicts the fight of female characters to overcome the constraints of patriarchal society in her works. It draws attention to the inferior status of Indian women in general and middle class educated women in particular. Additionally, it emphasizes how Divakaruni delves into the inner psychological lives of her female characters to highlight the subjugation of women inside patriarchal family structures. The synopsis seeks to shed light on Divakaruni's concerns regarding women in India. The specific goal of the study is to demonstrate how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni not only does depict the women's horrific experiences but also portrays the struggle of their emancipation from patriarchal constraints to develop their own identities. For

this study, six novels by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have been chosen: *Sister of My Heart (1999), The Vine of Desire (2002), The Palace of Illusions (2008), The Forest of Enchantments (2019), The Last Queen (2021), and Independence (2023).*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart* narrates the story of two families, each with a father who has mysteriously disappeared. The protagonists of the story, Sudha and Anju, are cousins who share their concerns, aspirations, and conflicts within the matriarchal Chatterjee household. Sudha is docile and married to Ashok, a conventional Bengali youth, while Anju is rebellious and marries a software engineer named Sunil, subsequently migrating to California. The novel explores themes such as identity, self-worth, womanhood, and immigrant experiences as the two protagonists navigate their lives.In the story, Sudha becomes pregnant with a girl child, but her in-laws desire her to abort the baby. However, Sudha defies them to save her child.

The Vine of Desire is a sequel to Sister of My Heart and follows Sudha's journey to establish her identity after being disillusioned with her husband, mother-in-law, and Ashok. At the request of Anju, who has lost her unborn son during an unexpected abortion, Sudha travels to California with her daughter, Dayita. Anju hopes that Sudha's arrival will bring back memories of her past. The novel also addresses the conflicts that arise due to immigration and promotes the importance of women's autonomy in determining the course of their lives. The characters in the story are depicted as fragile, with hidden desires that extend beyond the boundaries of their circumstances. The situation gets worse when Anju’s husband is attracted to Sudha. The marriage life of both the

sisters has come to an end. Simultaneously, their quest for self-autonomy, and happiness started to increase.

The Palace of Illusions revives Indian mythology from Draupadi's point of view. The author, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, attempts to provide a voice to Panchaali, the fire-born heroine of the Mahabharata. The novelist offers a vibrant interpretation of the ancient tale of Panchaali marrying five royal husbands. Throughout her journey, Panchaali strives to support her husbands and reclaim their status and kingdom. However, she is unable to disregard her complicated friendship with the enigmatic Krishna or her secret attraction to the mysterious man who is her husbands' most dangerous enemy. The novel details her progression from disbelief to realization, acceptance, and the outcome is both poignant and captivating. With this novel, Divakaruni is able to delve beyond the traditional, masculine version of the epic. The Palace of Illusions is centered on Draupadi, the strong-willed heroine of the Mahabharata, and the author's explicit intention is to present a "feminist" perspective on the great epic.

The Forest of Enchantments explores the internal psyche of Sita in the Ramayana and tells the story from Sita's point of view. The narrative also focuses on the experiences of other women in the epic, who are often misunderstood and marginalized. The powerful commentary on duty, betrayal, infidelity, and honor, as well as the struggles of women to maintain autonomy in a patriarchal society, are all explored in the story. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni does full justice to this epic narrative, depicting Sita's longing to give reasons, to fight, and to claim her voice.

The Last Queen is her first work of historical fiction. This novel draws inspiration from the true story of Rani Jindan Kaur, the wife of Ranjit Singh, the

Maharaja of the Sikh Empire. Following her husband's death, Rani Jindan Kaur faced formidable challenges from cunning courtiers and the British, yet she remained steadfast in her indomitable spirit. She was tasked with raising their six-year-old son, Dalip, and governing the kingdom. Her influence over the Khalsa troops in wars against the British government was well-known, and she was one of the few queens who chose to renounce the veil at court and address her forces directly. The author's efforts in bringing forth the story of this brave and capable woman, who fought for her rights and freedom, are evident in the novel.

Independence is a magnificent tale of three sisters, each with her own distinct personality, desires, and flaws, that tells the story of India's independence through their eyes. The novel demonstrates the resilience and strength of women who, even in the face of adversity, were able to hold themselves together.

Her novels have been chosen to highlight her understanding of the Indian women's liberation within a patriarchal society. Her novels mostly address the melancholic issues that affect women in family and society. She illustrates the inner lives of Indian women and their struggle in a rapidly shifting socioeconomic environment. They work to get out of repressive situation and, in the end, become independent of societal norms and lifestyles. The goal of the current study is to conduct a thorough and complete analysis of Divakaruni's selected six novels in order to demonstrate her devotion to spotlighting women's psychological trauma and equipping them with the strength to bravely conquer obstacles in life. Additionally, this study suggests that future researchers have plenty of space to investigate the treatment of feminism.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Metamorphosis is a change of form, structure, or substance especially by witchcraft and magic or an extraordinary change in appearance, character, and circumstances or the process of basic and usually rather sudden change in the form and habits of some animals during transformation from an immature stage (as a tadpole or a caterpillar) to an adult stage (as a frog or a butterfly). In literature this term comes from Franz Kafka's novella "*The Metamorphosis*". This novella tells the story of salesman Gregor Samsa, who wakes one morning to find himself inexplicably transformed into a huge insect and subsequently struggles to adjust to this new condition. In this research the term "metamorphosis" is used to show the transformation of women characters from the state of subjugation to emancipation.

The article entitled "Treatment of Female Oppression - An Insight into Selected Stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni" by Rajesh Bojan explores the theme of female oppression in the select stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

The thesis *entitled From Subjugation to Emancipation in Select Works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni* by Bharathi C endeavours bring out the themes such as human relationships, tradition Vs modernity and cultural encounter.

Vasigaran in his doctoral thesis titled *Cross-Cultural Experiences of the Indian Womanhood through a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective: A swot on the Select Works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni* portrays the Cross-Cultural experiences perceived in Divakaruni's works. The researcher emphasizes women's affliction in a patriarchal society.

K N Uma Devi & Dr. M. Naga Lakshmi in their article "Subjugation and Deprivation of Women in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni" brings

about Women in India used to face plenty of issues. This article seeks to demonstrate how women are simultaneously praised for being mothers and denigrated as objects.

V Vanitha in her theses titled *Celebration of Womanhood in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee* shows Divakaruni's perspectives on women's independence and how she depicts the development of new women in her works.

The research article “Myth and Modernity in Divakaruni’s The Palace of Illusions” by Akhil and Prajapati portrayed how Divakaruni’s Draupadi emerged as the symbol of both myth and modernity.This article highlighted Draupadi’s resistance to the injustices she had confronted as a women in her life.

Dr Meenakshi Dalal in her research article “The forest of enchantments: an eco-feminist perspective” unravel the deep, albiet the less acknowledged relation between ecology and women. Through a very contemporary retelling of the great epic, Chitra Banerjee seeks to convey a very modern need to empower the female if we want to create a kind and generous world.

From the review of the literature, it is found that a number of researches have been done on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s work from feminist perspective. But still certain areas have been left unexplored by the former researchers. Reviewing the previous research works, it is found that no in-depth study has been done on this topic. The topic “From Subordination to Liberation: A Study of Metamorphosis of Women Characters in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni” is an attempt to explore the research gap. The synopsis proposes that this research would give fresh insights into the phenomenon of emancipation as depicted by Chitra Banerjee in her novels.

Problems to be investigated

- To trace the development of women characters in the selected novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
- To analyse the reasons behind their transformation.
- To investigate the issues about women's subordination and liberation in the chosen novels.
- To study the psychological trauma of the female characters along with their condition in society.
- To address the several causes of marginalization.
- To shed light on the historical, social, political, economic, and emotional aspects that are necessary to understand Indian women's situation.
- To highlight gender inequality concerns and the negative effects they have on Indian society. Additionally, this study serves as a catalyst for the development of positive gender roles.

Aims and objectives of the study

- The present study explores the journey of emancipation of the select women characters by adopting a feminist stance.
- The present study attempts to examine selected texts from an Indo-centric feminist perspective in order to define its distinction.
- As the title suggests, the focus is on the women and their constant battles in their lives to emancipate themselves.
- The study is an exploration of the struggles and conflicts that women go through merely because of being women.
- The objective of the study is to investigate feminist issues in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

- Keeping the controversial and burning topic in mind thorough research of feminist narrative and consciousness in Indian literature will be discussed in detail.
- The objective is to reveal the complete metamorphosis of the female protagonists and their search for identity.

Hypothesis

The author portrays various concerns that are supposed to transform her women characters. An in-depth analysis of women characters in the light of socio-cultural and economic situations will bring out new insight to enrich our understanding of humanity in general and women in particular. These novels could be used as a manual to understand and interpret contemporary situations of women. Women characters of the select novels offer the scope to explore their journey from subordination to liberation. The characters have gone through significant transformation and rise from a docile to self-emancipated state of existence, where they are assertive of their needs and desires.

Research Methodology

The methodology applied to this proposed research work is a close textual analysis. In this study, feminist perspective will be used to explore the journey of emancipation of select women characters. The method of this research will be the interpretation and analysis of the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Qualitative method of research will be used to investigate the problems. The intensive study of selected novels will be carried out to trace the problems faced by women characters. For the sake of developing a comprehensive and adequate understanding of the select novels, it is essential to interpret these novels. An in-

depth analysis of the works will be done using different approaches of feminist study.

Tools to be Used

The process of the research involves intensive use of library material, historical records, online study and reference material on the Internet, books, and journals. This leads to a number of clues for further investigation that can advance this research. A close reading of the author's works will be done to critically analyze them in conforming to the topic of the study.

Significance of the study

This study is important because it sheds light on how the women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels changed. The significance of this study is to identify the transformation of women characters throughout their lives. This study is about metamorphosis of women characters due to some conditions like patriarchy, societal norms, sexist ideologies, and the search for their identity. The novels' women characters get transformed in their struggle for survival in the world. The female characters in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels are not rebellious by nature from beginning. Instead, their circumstances and conditions cause them problems, which in turn lead them to become rebellious in order to overcome the challenges they face in life. These struggles allow them to take control of their own lives and to define their existence as women. As a result of these struggles, they develop new qualities of self-dependence and gain diverse perspectives to view their lives. Divakaruni's heroines bring out a transformative change in the lives of women.

Plan of the Work

The proposed thesis will be tentatively divided into the following chapters

Chapter l: Introduction

Chapter ll: Literature Review

Chapter lll: Subordination of Women

Chapter lV: Metamorphosis of Women

Chapter V: Liberation of Women

Chapter Vl: Conclusion

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter will provide the introduction of the study. In English literature, women have been acknowledged in a number of ways. The literary genre known as feminism opened the door for feminist theorists to address women's issues. A significant portion of current Indian writing in English is composed of works written by women authors. This chapter will introduce these writers and their works. Women writers have realized the potential of human achievements and a completely different world because women are indispensable in all fields of Indian-English literature and the admiration of its writings.

Chapter II : Literature Review

K N Uma Devi & Dr. M. Naga Lakshmi in their article “Subjugation and Deprivation of Women in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni” bring out women’s issue. This article seeks to demonstrate how women are simultaneously praised for being mothers and denigrated as objects.

V Vanitha in her theses titled “Celebration of Womanhood in the Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee” shows Divakaruni's perspectives on women's independence and how she depicts the development of new women in her works.

A brief literature review of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s work is done to identify the research gap. The metamorphosis of female protagonists in the select novels has not yet been studied. No one has done a substantive study on these

novels from this perspective. The topic “From Subordination to Liberation: A Study of Metamorphosis of Women Characters in Select Novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni” is an attempt to explore the research gap. The synopsis proposes that this research would give fresh insights into the phenomenon of emancipation as depicted by Chitra Banerjee in her novels.

Chapter III: Subordination of women

The subordination of female characters and their struggle for liberation are the main concepts of this chapter. Her concentration is on Indian women. They are unable to define their own identities and are stuck in a transitional phase. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has proven that women have the power to limit society through her novels *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*, which have elevated marginalized women to the status of the new Icon of Independence. Indian women have been shown as strong, independent female characters who, while trying to re-establish themselves in their community, history, and society, appear to be grappling with challenging concerns related to their identity, selfhood, and roles in the family and society. In *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* she highlights the distinct and captivating voices of the epic's female characters. Divakaruni defies conventions in her two retellings by portraying the females as the epics' "heroes." She told the complete epics again from the viewpoint of the female heroes, who in turn gave voice to the supposedly "less important women characters of the epics. In *The Last Queen* she presents the fierce character of queen Jindan Kaur, last wife of Ranjit Singh. Rani Jindan’s character changes at many staged of life and each stage presents her hardship and struggle of life. She was the victim of patriarchal society. Her life undergoes many changes that make her strong and rebellious. She covered a long journey from a daughter of commoner to the queen of

Punjab. Her recent work *Independence* is the story of three sisters' life in Bengal. According to the author this novel is sequel of *The Last Queen*.

Chapter IV: Metamorphosis of women

The female characters in Divakaruni's works express their identities as "New Women," striving to keep a steady balance between tradition and modernity while developing into self-sufficient, independent, and encouraging individuals. This chapter analyses the transformation of the protagonists, Sudha, Anju, Panchali, Sita, Jindan, Priya, Deepa and Jamini from feminist perspective. The women of these novels start breaking their shells and trying to escape that by themselves. They build themselves strong enough to face every barrier and become transformed in all phases. They construct their own path to overcome the obstacles of their life. The protagonists in Divakaruni have the courage to abandon their ideal lives in pursuit of truth and the greater good. They acknowledge that things are disgusting, throw their hands up in desperation at what they cannot understand, and walk away unaffected and without feeling guilty or irresponsible for their passivity.

Chapter V: Liberation of women

The female protagonists in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works are troubled by their situations. Their hardships incite them to rebel against all challenges of life. This chapter will analyze how these hardships transform them into fresh, independent women who view the world from a variety of angles. Divakaruni's novels have female centrality. She portrays the transformation of women from subordination to liberation as well as different transformation they undergo through their entire life. Complete focus is on the life of the protagonists. Exploration of female identity and subjectivity in these novels involves an analysis that shapes the

lives of these women. This transformation and transitions are necessary for the woman, who undergoes challenging situations because of patriarchy, gender discrimination and cultural clashes while crossing borders as well as in their own country.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

The concluding chapter incorporates the findings of the research and places them in the contemporary perspective. This study will emphasize how Chitra Banerjee's chosen literary masterpieces demonstrate the independence of women. This chapter will summarize the research with a reflection from the researcher.

Scope for Future Research

The study of the select novels is enriching and it opens up several possibilities for further studies. This study aims to explore transformation of women characters in the select novels. A researcher can further explore the current study by taking different feminist approaches and challenge conventional social norms to analyze current societal problems.

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